



We had great views of all five of the world's ground rollers. Here, a Short-legged Ground Roller. (Dani Lopez-Velasco)

ULTIMATE MADAGASCAR

1 OCTOBER – 20/25 OCTOBER 2016

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This year's Ultimate Madagascar tour delivered once again an impressive selection of Malagasy specialities, including excellent views of all of the Ground Rollers, Asitys, Couas and Mesites plus the spectacular Cuckoo Roller and, for those who undertook the extension to the Masoala Peninsula where we saw the incomparable Helmet and the rare Bernier's Vangas, all of the world's Vangas too. Aside from the birds we found a fine selection of lemurs and some cracking reptiles too. Despite some hassles, especially concerning flights with Air Madagascar, the tour logistics ran relatively smoothly, at least for Madagascar standards, and the weather throughout was generally fine and sunny.

The tour began with a four-hour drive from the capital, Antananarivo, eastwards towards our base at Perinet. We made a couple of stops on the journey, and had our first taste of common Malagasy birds such as Malagasy White-eye, Madagascar Cisticola, Common Jery and Red Fody. We eventually made it to our hotel, where we had a pleasant lunch overlooking a fruiting tree, attended by several cracking Madagacan Blue Pigeons and a single Madagascar Green Pigeon. After admiring the pigeons for a while we set off for some initial exploration. Our expert local guide first led us to a roosting Madagascar (Long-eared) Owl. After studying the fine plumage of this bird on top of a pine tree, we moved on. Our next target was the smart Madagascar Pygmy Kingfisher, and we quickly found a very obliging bird at a regular stake out by the road.

Next on the agenda was Madagascar Wood Rail. We ventured into the forest and soon heard the calls of the rail. Luckily it didn't take long before we had no less than three nice wood rails on the trail showing very well. And, to finish off the day, we had brief views of a Nuthatch Vanga on the way back to the hotel.



The stunning Pitta-like Ground Roller. (DLV)

After a very early breakfast we were on our way to Mantadia NP, arriving there a couple of hours later. This would turn out to be a memorable day for everyone. Before entering the trails we heard the call of the highly desired Pitta-like Ground Roller. Fortunately the bird was very responsive and within a couple of minutes we had it perched on a branch, in full view, just a few metres away. What a stunning bird! Very pleased with this, we moved into the forest. Our first target was Scaly Ground Roller, and again it didn't disappoint, as within a few hundred metres we had already found one, which gave excellent views. Also in the area we had a Hook-billed Vanga, calling from the canopy and some Black-and-white Ruffed Lemurs. Our next target was Short-legged Ground Roller, so we set off in search of one. This ground roller didn't give itself up easily at all, and finding one ended up being quite an adventure, that included a strenuous hike up a steep forested hill, without any kind of trail... But it was definitely well worth it, as we finally enjoyed fabulous views of this great



A confiding Scaly Ground Roller at Mantadia. (DLV)

species – a three-ground roller day must be a very good day! Tired, but well satisfied with our success, we returned back to the vehicle. We had lunch by a tranquil forest pool, where a pair of Madagascar Grebes sat on the water. Several Madagascar Spinetails flew overhead, and we also noted a single Madagascar Harrier-Hawk, a pair of Madagascar Buzzards, our first Ward's Flycatcher, Red-tailed, White-headed and Chabert's Vangas, Rand's Warbler, Spectacled Tetraka, Long-billed Bernieria, Madagascar Starling, Madagascar Swamp Warbler, Nelicourvi Weaver and Madagascar Mannikin. In the afternoon we went in search of Madagascar (Crested) Ibis, and after a bit of wandering around in the forest we eventually found a pair of these retiring birds, which showed well both walking on the ground and in flight, revealing a lot of white in the wings. The return journey to our lodge was punctuated by a stop to view a sneaky Madagascar Rail, which showed very nicely in the open. A productive evening outing produced great views of a singing Rainforest Scops Owl as well as the recently described Goodman's Mouse Lemur, together with some chameleons and frogs.



A pair of cute Collared Nightjars at Perinet. (DLV)

Next morning we woke up to the amazing cries of some close Indris, which were later seen from the dining room. What a good alarm clock! Today we would visit the VOI Reserve. We hadn't been in the trails for long when a strange feline-like sound caught our attention. Our guide quickly identified it as mating Fossas (!), so we went straight into the forest to look for them. Our man in the spot eventually found one sitting on a tree, but unfortunately by the time we arrived the Fossa had already moved away. In spite of all of our efforts, we couldn't track it down again. Afterwards we continued our birding, and eventually the hoped-for Red-breasted Coua was coaxed into view, even walking on the trail in front of us! The next bird we were hoping to see was the rare Collared Nightjar. The local guide knew of a roosting pair, but probably because of the heavy rains the previous night, the birds weren't at the usual spot. However, our skilled guide eventually found them roosting at another place, and we had fabulous looks at them. In my opinion this is probably the most beautifully patterned of all the world's nightjars. Very happy with this sighting, we went back to the vehicle. As we were about to jump in, I heard a Madagascar Flufftail calling very close, and after a bit of playback we all managed terrific views of a male. We then returned to our accommodation for lunch. The rest of the day was taken up with a drive via to Tana, stopping en route to watch a single Madagascar Pratincole sitting on rocks by the river.

Our plane to Tulear and then on to Fort Dauphin departed very early morning next day. Surprisingly we had

a very close Marsh Owl flying and haunting over the short grass on the side of the runway. Good bonus! Once we got to Fort Dauphin, we drove on the bumpy road to Berenty. After a good lunch, surrounded by adorable and very inquisitive Ring-tailed Lemurs, we started our birding. A pair of Giant Couas showed exceedingly well, and we also saw our first Verreaux's Sifakas and White-footed Sportive Lemurs, while a very obliging White-browed Hawk-Owl glared down at us from its roosting place. After dinner, we went owling and almost instantly enjoyed point-blank views of a pair of Torotoroka Scops Owls.



Indri. (DLV)

Madagascar Sandgrouse was our priority bird number one next morning, and we devoted the first hours of daylight searching for it. Driving around some nearby fields proved fruitless, so we headed to another spot. And as luck would have it, as soon as we arrived we saw two birds in flight, albeit distantly. We headed to the area where they seemed to have landed, but couldn't find them again. However, as we were about to leave a male flew by very close, allowing for excellent views. We then went back for breakfast, and spent the rest of the morning exploring the gallery forest trails at Berenty where we had an all too brief Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk. Giant Couas were common, and we had walk-away views of several birds, which could almost be touched. Also seen were two roosting Western Barn Owls, another White-browed Hawk-Owl, some Crested Couas plus numerous lemurs and a colony of Madagascar Flying Foxes. After lunch we returned to Fort Dauphin, seeing a pair of Madagascar Buttonquails on the way. Once we reached our destination we headed to the bay, and succeeded in finding a pair of Madagascar Gulls. A bit of seawatching also produced some distant Wedge-tailed Shearwaters and Greater Crested Terns.

Very early next morning we headed to Andohahela NP, in search of the rare Red-tailed Newtonia. After a two-hour drive we made it to the place, and then started walking along the trail. Once we reached the known territory it didn't take more than a minute to find a pair of very obliging newtonias, showing very low down. Wow, it took far less than expected! Other birds here included Frances's Sparrowhawk, Cuckoo-Roller and Nuthatch Vanga. We went back to Fort Dauphin for lunch, and given we had some free time in the afternoon; we decided to do a bit of exploration. We ended up in a wonderful pristine beach, watching a pair of Humpback Whales doing all kinds of behaviour, including frequent breaching, very close to shore for more than half an hour. What a great way to finish off the day.



The rare Red-tailed Newtonia. (DLV)

Next day we went again to the headland near Fort Dauphin, seeing some more Madagascan Gulls and another Humpback Whale, before going to the airport. Our flight to Tulear was almost on time, and after dropping off our bags and freshening up for a few minutes we visited the nearby tablelands. Bird activity was rather poor, and we failed to see the hoped-for Red-shouldered Vanga. On the other hand, our other target here, Verreaux's Coua, was seen briefly. Madagascan Larks and Namaqua Doves were present in numbers, and we had some good looks at Subdesert Brush Warbler as well.



Male Red-shouldered Vanga. (DLV)

The following morning we returned to the tablelands, and this time we enjoyed walk-away views of a pair of vocal Red-shouldered Vangas, a species only recently rediscovered. It was then time to drive to the harbour, where zebu carts were waiting to transport us to a speedboat, which would take us to the island of Nosy Ve. After an uneventful journey in calm seas, we finally arrived to the island, and walked straight to the famous colony of Red-tailed Tropicbirds. These stunning birds showed to perfection, both in flight, where they put on some amazing aerial displays, and under the bushes where they were nesting. We spent a couple of very enjoyable hours admiring and photographing these truly elegant white birds. A short boat ride then took us to

the village of Anakao where our target bird, Littoral Rock Thrush, was quickly found. We had a sumptuous lunch (the best one of the tour, right Richard?) by the ocean, and after a short rest we returned to Tulear. Here, we transferred to 4WD vehicles and headed north towards Ifaty. After an hour we reached the favoured area of the rare Madagascar Plover on the desiccated salt flats south of Ifaty and were soon enjoying excellent, up-close views of two adults. Good numbers of Curlew Sandpipers and Kittlitz's Plovers were present, as well as 2 Little Stints and a White-fronted Plover. Afterwards we drove a short distance to our wonderful hotel, located by the beach, for a two-night stay. Madagascar Nightjars were very vocal as we ate dinner, with one seen very well in the spotlight.



Red-tailed Tropicbird a Nosy Ve. (DLV)

At dawn next morning we were already in the incredible spiny forest, with a select set of mouth-watering species in mind. The birding was unbelievably good, and thanks to our local guide Mosa and his helpers we had more or less cleaned up by 8 am! New birds kept coming hot on the heels of each other. First up was a pair of wonderful Long-tailed Ground Rollers at very close quarters. Then, a Thamnornis (Warbler) was tracked down singing from top of a Didiera tree. Next was a Running Coua on top of a bush, followed by a pair of Archbold's Newtonias that eventually settled down and gave fine views. Minutes later, we were all watching a cracking Lafresnaye's Vanga, together with a pair of incredible Sickle-billed Vangas. Not far from there, the uncommon Madagascar Sparrowhawk was easily found perched on a tree near its nest. Next on the agenda was Subdesert Mesite, and we were taken straight to one that was sitting motionless on a branch and giving superb views. A Madagascar Harrier-Hawk was also seen, while our final target, Brown-capped (Green-capped) Coua was soon coaxed into view. Absolutely epic three hours of birding! This impressive list was tallied before we returned to our hotel for breakfast, the time still only 8 am but the temperature rising rapidly. After breakfast we decided to check a nearby lake. On the way I noticed a big heron perched on top of some mangroves in a river mouth, which turned out to be a Humblot's Heron. A very unexpected bird here, which was enjoyed by all, and our only one of the trip. Once at the lake, Andy found us two beautiful Greater Painted Snipes, which were seen very well in the scope, together with some other waders, that included a rare Wood Sandpiper, as well as a couple of leucistic Madagascar Swamp Warblers. Even better was a female Malagasy Harrier flying low over the reeds. After such a good haul we went back to the hotel for lunch and a short rest. In the afternoon we paid another visit to the spiny forest,

where the usual suspects were seen. In the mammal front we were taken to see a yet undescribed Sportive Lemur, with very peculiar black shoulders, while not far we also saw a White-footed Sportive Lemur. On the way back, we had nice looks at a pair of Three-banded Plovers of the endemic subspecies, considered to be a valid species by some authorities.



Spiny forest with Baobabs at Ifaty. (DLV)

We departed early next morning, and after three hours we reached Zombitse Forest. We soon entered the trails, where it didn't take long to find our main target, Appert's Tetraka, with a small group of three birds feeding on the leaf litter totally unconcerned by our presence. We had a picnic lunch here, and were joined by two tame Giant Couas! We then continued towards our base for the night, Isalo. Once we dropped our luggage we went to the surrounding area in search of the uncommon Madagascan Partridge. We walked in a line through the grassland, and within half an hour we had already found a partridge, which gave good views. This is a difficult bird than can be easily missed, so we were very pleased with our sighting. With half an hour of daylight left, we diverted to the Isalo Museum to look for Benson's Rock Thrush (now considered to be part of Forest Rock Thrush), and it didn't take long to find a gorgeous male, which gave excellent views amidst some spectacular scenery.

Most of next day was devoted to driving towards Ranomafana, seeing little of note on the way. Once we reached the park, we went to look for Madagascan Snipe in some nearby rice paddies, but the only birds seen here was a pair of Greater Painted Snipe. Unfortunately the good habitat has been recently cleared, and our guide said that the usual Grey Emetails were now gone. And our back-up site for the species wasn't accessible due to a broken bridge. We spent the last hour of daylight walking quietly along the road, and this produced great views of a male Forest Rock Thrush and a pair of confiding Madagascan Starlings.



Long-tailed Ground Roller at Ifaty. (DLV)

Next morning we visited Vohiparara, with a number of targets in mind. One of the first birds seen as we entered the forest was a Pitta-like Ground Roller, walking ahead of us, followed by a flock of the uncommon Grey-crowned Tetraka and a single Common Sunbird-Asity. The ground roller we were after today was not Pitta-like though, but the scarce Rufous-headed, which would be our last one of the world's five ground rollers. Luckily, at the second place we tried we had a response, and after a tense wait, the bird popped up just a couple of metres from us. We enjoyed terrific views of this great looking bird, which was joined by a second individual. Yes, mission accomplished! In the same area we found a Madagascan Yellowbrow and a pair of Dark Newtonias, while we also caught up with Wedge-tailed Jery. Moving further on, we heard the



Male Velvet Asity at Vohiparara. (DLV)

song of the retiring Brown Emutail, and we quickly positioned ourselves. We were in luck again, as this usually very shy bird was quite responsive, and gave good views to everyone. Next was the cracking Yellow-

bellied Sunbird-Asity, one of the main targets for the morning. We walked towards a regular stake-out, and soon heard the high pitched calls of one. After a short wait we were all watching a pair of these lovely birds feeding in some flowers. Our guide then informed us that they were nesting not far from there, but another group was waiting in the nest area, spending way too much time in the vicinity. After about half an hour, they left, and we had a quick look at the nest and then carried on. The morning wasn't over though, as while looking at a mixed flock we heard the call of Pollen's Vanga, which showed briefly to most of the group. After such a successful morning we returned to the vehicles and had a picnic lunch by the parking lot. In the afternoon we did some roadside birding again, highlighted by a confiding Red-fronted Coua, a male Forest Fody and another Forest Rock Thrush.



Ring-tailed Lemurs at Berenty. (DLV)

With only a small list of possible new birds, we headed back to Vohiparara. We heard a couple of distant Cryptic Warblers before encountering a close one, which eventually was seen by everyone, both singing from top of a tree and feeding in the midstorey. In the same area we found a couple of cracking male Velvet Asity, very well behaved and sitting eye-level and just a couple feet from us. Excellent! We also heard distant Brown Mesites, but in spite of our efforts they didn't come close enough. Being a priority bird, we headed back to the vehicle, to drive to Ranomafana. As we were walking back a vocal Henst's Goshawk flew overhead. Once in the main reserve, we walked at a brisk pace, until a pair of showy Crossley's Vangas was found just by the trail. After admiring them for a while we carried on until we reached a known mesite territory. The birds responded immediately, and thanks to some great work by our local guides we had point-blank views of one of these shy creatures. Having seen everything we wanted here, we returned to our hotel. We were informed that the time of our flight next day had been moved forward, so bearing in mind the very long journey ahead, we decided to start driving north in the afternoon. A short stop before dusk at a small marsh was very productive, giving us our only Madagascan Snipes of the trip.

We went to the airport next day, only to receive the news that the flight had been cancelled. Nothing unusual for Air Madagascar... Anyway, with a lot of time to spare until next day we decided to visit the nearby Lac Alarobia. Birding here was enjoyable, with masses of waterfowl gathered and the heronry in full swing. Amongst the numerous Red-billed Teals and White-faced Whistling Ducks we found several Hottentot Teals but the real prize were several Meller's Ducks, an infrequent visitor to this urban site, together with a rare Fulvous Whistling Duck and a Red-knobbed Coot. The heronry held several smart Malagasy Pond Herons plus lots of Squacco and Black Herons, Western Cattle and Dimorphic Egrets. Other birds seen here included White-throated Rail, Malagasy Brush Warbler, Mascarene Martin and Red Fody.

The flight to Majunga next morning was predictably delayed, but in the end we finally embarked by lunchtime. Birding in the airport is productive, and this time we noted a pair of Madagascar Partridge on the runway! Once we reached our destination we were informed that half of the luggage hadn't been stored in the plane, and it would arrive in the evening flight. Typical Air Mad (also known as Air Maybe) stuff. There was nothing else we could do but wait, and finally the bags arrived. It was then time to drive south to our base at Ampijoroa, where we arrived by 11 pm.



Giant Coua at Zombitse. (DLV)

We were already in the forest by dawn next morning. Almost unbelievably, the very first bird seen was the retiring White-breasted Mesite. We managed to coax into view a pair of them, which came walking straight towards us and were enjoyed at length. And at one stage they were even joined by a Coquerel's Coua. Pleased with this, we then started searching for the stunning Schlegel's Asity. After just a few minutes I found a male, and during the next half an hour we had repeated close looks at it. What an incredible bird, the electric colour of its bare face skin being really out of this world! We returned to the research station, where Coquerel's Sifakas, Broad-billed Rollers, Sickle-billed Vangas, Madagascar Hoopoes and lots of Lesser Vasa Parrots performed nicely, and quickly set off to explore another area of forest in search of the rare Van Dam's Vanga. While walking up the forest we encountered a pair of Red-capped Couas –our last of the world's couas!-, and as luck would have it, as soon as we entered the vanga territory we heard a bird calling. We followed the call and in no time we were watching a pair of these endangered vangas with their powerful bills at arms length. We observed them for a while, and they sure proved very obliging. Supporting cast in the same area included a Banded Kestrel and a pair of Rufous Vangas. Pressure off after seeing basically everything possible in the forest, and it was only 9 am! We then headed to a lake about half an hour away, where several Madagascar Jacanas were soon in the scope. After lunch and a short rest, we boarded a small boat for a very pleasant afternoon cruise around Lac Ravelobe. Even before departing we had already seen our target Madagascar Fish Eagle, with one bird sitting quietly on a tree near the boat-landing place. This is a Critically Endangered species, with less than 100 pairs thought to be left in the wild, so it was a privilege to see such a rare bird. We then carried on with our boat trip, seeing several Glossy Ibis, many Squacco Herons, some Three-banded Plovers, as well as the other member of the pair of Madagascar Fish Eagle, which gave fantastic views in the afternoon light. It had certainly been an unforgettable day.

In the early morning we drove back to Majunga, where a boat was waiting in the beach to take us to the Betsiboka Estuary. An hour later we were watching our two targets, as several pairs Bernier's Teal and a

handful of Malagasy Sacred Ibis were found on the muddy fringes of mangrove covered islands, together with some Lesser Flamingos. Dimorphic Egrets were abundant and shorebirds were also numerous, with many Terek and Curlew Sandpipers and Greater Sand Plovers feeding on the mudflats. We were back on shore by midday, and enjoyed a good seafood lunch by the coast. In the afternoon we drove back to Ampijoroa.



Madagascar Fish Eagle. (DLV)

Next morning we visited the same Schlegel' Asity forest patch, but this time we only had a brief view of the male. However, frame-filling views of a female Banded Kestrel more than compensated. After breakfast we embarked on the long journey to Tana, punctuated by a few stops, the best one to watch a nice and very close male Malagasy Harrier.

Those undertaking the tour extension went to Tana airport first thing in the morning. After the usual delay, we finally made to Maroantsetra, and after dropping off our bags we set off on a short boat trip along the nearby estuary. Gale-force southerly winds brought hundreds of terns to shore, that included many hundred Roseate, Common, Lesser-crested and Greater Crested Terns, as well as an adult and a juvenile Sooty Tern and a couple of adult Bridled Terns.



Male Schlegel's Asity. (DLV)

The next morning we set off very early by motor launch and reached our lodge on the Masoala Peninsular a couple of hours later. Highlight of the journey was a tern feeding frenzy that contained several Brown Noddies. After leaving our bags we quickly set off on the trails to look for our priority target, the incomparable and out-of-this-world Helmet Vanga. There was no nest known by the time we were there, so it was all about finding an adult in the forest. This is usually not too difficult, and it only took 45 minutes to find a gorgeous adult, which was enjoyed for a while. This bird is surely a good-enough reason to visit Madagascar! Pressure off, we carried on with our birding, seeing some mixed flocks that contained various species, including Spectacled Tetraka, Long-billed Bernieria, Madagascan Cuckooshrike and Rufous Vanga. In the afternoon we went for a short walk and were treated to fabulous views of Red Ruffed Lemur. After dinner we went in search of Rainforest Scops Owl, which was seen very well under the torch beam.



Helmet Vanga. (DLV)

After breakfast and a short boat ride we set off inland along the trails near Tampolo. After an hour walking we reached a small clearing where a female Bernier's Vanga was seen briefly, but soon flew away. We then visited another clearing and settled down to wait for another one to appear. About half an hour later a male was found perched on a treetop, and in the end came closer, allowing for good looks. Later, it was joined by a female, and we all saw them well in the scope. A short walk in the afternoon didn't produce anything of note, while at night we connected with Eastern Avahi, Brown Mouse Lemur and Greater Dwarf Lemur.

Our final full day at Masoala commenced with a visit to another part of forest. The highlight was undoubtedly a pair of Helmet Vangas in the early stages of nest building, which showed ridiculously well. Some other previously seen forest species were noted, and we all happily returned to our lodge for lunch. In the afternoon some opted to go snorkelling just in front of our cabins, while Madagascan Pratincoles flew overhead. A short night walk gave us a great-looking Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko, and, best of all, a Collared Nightjar perched on a bush by the beach.

Our boat to Maroantsetra left soon after dawn, and from there we boarded a small plane to Sambava, to get a connecting flight to Tana. At first, they said the latter flight was cancelled and we had to stay overnight, but once we arrived the news that the flight was actually leaving were most welcome! And finally it was all over, we arrived to Tina in time for all our international flights back home, and said goodbye to each other. I want to say a big thank you to our local guide Armel for all his help during the trip.



Totoroka Scops Owl. (DLV)



Broad-billed Roller and White-breasted Mesite. (DLV)





Rufous-headed Ground Roller and Crossley's Vanga. (DLV)





Madagascar Plover and Helmet Vanga. (DLV)





Verreaux's Sifaka and Masoala. (DLV)



SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

The species names and taxonomy used in the report mostly follows Gill, F & D Donsker (Eds). **IOC World Bird Names**. This list is updated several times annually and is available at <http://www.worldbirdnames.org>.

Species which were heard but not seen are indicated by the symbol (H). Species which were only recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (LO). Species which were not personally recorded by the leader are indicated by the symbol (NL).

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g. it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* Widespread, large numbers at Lac Alarobia.

Fulvous Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna bicolor* One seen at Lac Alarobia.

Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* One at Lac Alarobia.

Meller's Duck ◊ *Anas melleri* Up to four at Lac Alarobia.



Fulvous Whistling Duck, Hottentot Teal and Madagascar Grebe. (DLV)

Bernier's Teal ◊ (Madagascar T) *Anas bernieri* 12 at the Betsiboka Estuary.

Red-billed Teal *Anas erythrorhyncha* Present on several wetlands, sometimes numerous.

Hottentot Teal *Anas hottentota* Several at Lac Alarobia.

Helmeted Guineafowl *Numida meleagris* Several at Berenty.

Madagascar Partridge ◊ *Margaroperdix madagarensis* One at Isalo and a pair at Tana airport.
Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica* Several off Fort Dauphin.
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* Several on the way to Ifaty.
Madagascar Grebe ◊ *Tachybaptus pelzelni* Two at Mantadia.



Malagasy Pond Heron, Madagascar Pratincole and Bernier's Teal. (DLV)

Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor* A few at the Betsiboka.
Red-tailed Tropicbird ◊ *Phaethon rubricauda* Great views on Nosy Ve where about 30 were seen.
Yellow-billed Stork *Mycteria ibis* Two over Majunga.
Malagasy Sacred Ibis ◊ *Threskiornis bernieri* 3 at the Betsiboka Estuary.
Madagascar Ibis ◊ (M Crested I) *Lophotibis cristata* A pair showed very well at Perinet.
Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* Seen a couple of times.
Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* One seen briefly.
Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* Many at Alarobia, a few elsewhere.
Striated Heron *Butorides striata* Widespread in small numbers.
Squacco Heron *Ardeola ralloides* Locally common.
Malagasy Pond Heron ◊ *Ardeola idae* Several breeding birds at Lac Alarobia.
Western Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* Widespread except in more arid country, sometimes common.
Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* A few sightings.
Humblot's Heron ◊ *Ardea humbloti* One at Lac Ravelobe.
Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* Several at Lac Ravelobe, a few elsewhere.

Great Egret *Ardea alba* Widespread in small numbers.
Black Heron *Egretta ardesiaca* Present at several wetlands.
Dimorphic Egret ◊ *Egretta dimorpha* Widespread, locally common.
Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta* A few sightings.
Reed Cormorant (Long-tailed C) *Microcarbo africanus* A few sightings.



Madagascar Fish Eagle and Banded Kestrel. (DLV)

Madagascar Harrier-Hawk ◊ *Polyboroides radiatus* One in Ifaty showed well, a few more elsewhere.
Madagascar Cuckoo-Hawk ◊ *Aviceda madagascariensis* One briefly at Berenty.
Frances's Sparrowhawk ◊ *Accipiter francesiae* A few seen.
Madagascar Sparrowhawk ◊ *Accipiter madagascariensis* Great views at Ifaty.
Henst's Goshawk ◊ *Accipiter henstii* One vocal bird briefly at Ranomafana.
Malagasy Harrier ◊ *Circus macroscelus* One female near Tulear and a great male on the way to Tana.
Yellow-billed Kite *Milvus aegyptius* Locally common in the south with a few elsewhere.
Madagascar Fish Eagle ◊ *Haliaeetus vociferoides* Two adults at Lac Ravelobe.
Madagascar Buzzard ◊ *Buteo brachypterus* Several seen.
White-breasted Mesite ◊ *Mesitornis variegatus* Great views at Ampijoroa.
Brown Mesite ◊ *Mesitornis unicolor* Great views at Ranamofana.
Subdesert Mesite ◊ *Monias benschi* Seen well at Ifaty.
Madagascar Wood Rail ◊ *Canirallus kioloides* A pair showed well at Perinet.
Madagascar Flufftail ◊ *Sarothrura insularis* Seen well at Perinet.
Madagascar Rail ◊ *Rallus madagascariensis* One showed well near Mantadia gate.
White-throated Rail ◊ *Dryolimnas cuvieri* Seen twice.
Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* Noted at several locations.
Red-knobbed Coot *Fulica cristata* One at Alarobia.

Madagascar Buttonquail *Turnix nigricollis* Great views near Berenty.
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* Several near Tulear.
Grey Plover (Black-bellied P) *Pluvialis squatarola* A few at the coast.
Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* Several on the Betsiboka Estuary and near Tulear.
Madagascar Plover *Charadrius thoracicus* Two adults near Ifaty.
Kittlitz's Plover *Charadrius pecuarius* Common in the Tulear/ Ifaty area.
Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris* Seen several times. See note.
White-fronted Plover *Charadrius marginatus* Noted at coastal sites.



Malagasy Harrier, male and female. (DLV)

Greater Sand Plover *Charadrius leschenaultii* A few at the Betsiboka Estuary.
Greater Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis* Great views of a pair near Tulear, and also near Ranomafana.
Madagascar Jacana *Actophilornis albinucha* 7 near Ampijoroa.
Madagascar Snipe *Gallinago macrodactyla* Two seen well near Ambositra.
Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica* A few at Tulear.

Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* Several at the Betsiboka Estuary and on the west coast.
Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* Present at several coastal sites.
Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* Numerous at the Betsiboka Estuary.
Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* One near Tulear.
Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* Present at several wetlands.
Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* Several on the west coast.
Sanderling *Calidris alba* A few in Fort Dauphin.
Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea* Numerous at the Betsiboka Estuary and near Tulear.
Little Stint *Calidris minuta* Two near Ifaty.
Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus* Seen off Forth Dauphin.



Rainforest and Torotoroka Scops Owls. (DLV)

Madagascan Pratincole \diamond *Glareola ocularis* One near Mangoro and several at Masoala.
Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* A few seen well on the boat trip in Masoala.
Madagascan Gull \diamond *Larus (dominicanus) melisandae* Two in flight at Fort Dauphin at the second attempt.
Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* Two at Nosy Ve.
Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* A few at Nosy Ve, several at Fort Dauphin and Masoala.
Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* Many in Masoala.
Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* Two adults at Masoala.
Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* Adult and juvenile seen very well in Masoala.
Roseate Tern *Sterna dougallii* Hundreds at Masoala.
Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* Many at Masoala.
White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* One seen well in Maroantsetra.
Madagascan Sandgrouse \diamond *Pterocles personatus* Several at Berenty.
Rock Dove (Feral Pigeon) *Columba livia* Present in some urban areas.
Malagasy Turtle Dove \diamond *Nesoenas picturata* Regularly seen in various forested areas.
Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* Common in arid country.
Madagascan Green Pigeon \diamond *Treron australis* Noted at several locations.

Madagascar Blue Pigeon ◇ *Alectroenas madagascariensis* Seen well a few times.
Malagasy Coucal ◇ *Centropus toulou* Fairly common and widespread.
Crested Coua ◇ *Coua cristata* Widespread and noted at various locations. See note.
Verreaux's Coua ◇ *Coua verreauxi* Excellent views of 2 at Tulear tablelands-
Blue Coua ◇ *Coua caerulea* Several excellent encounters in the rainforest.
Red-capped Coua ◇ *Coua ruficeps* Several seen at Ampijoroa.



Madagascar Blue Pigeon and Madagascar Green Pigeon. (DLV)

Brown-capped Coua ◇ (Green-c C) *Coua (ruficeps) olivaceiceps* Great views at Ifaty.
Red-fronted Coua ◇ *Coua reynaudii* Seen at Ranomafana.
Coquerel's Coua ◇ *Coua coquereli* Many seen well at Ampijoroa.
Running Coua ◇ *Coua cursor* Seen well at Ifaty.
Giant Coua ◇ *Coua gigas* Excellent views at Zombitse and Berenty.
Red-breasted Coua ◇ *Coua serriana* Two at Perinet and heard in Masoala.
Madagascar Cuckoo ◇ *Cuculus rochii* Often heard, occasionally seen.
Western Barn Owl *Tyto alba* 2 roosting at Berenty.
Torotoroka Scops Owl ◇ *Otus madagascariensis* Seen very well at Berenty.

Rainforest Scops Owl ◊ *Otus rutilus* Seen well in Perinet and Masoala.
White-browed Hawk-Owl ◊ *Ninox superciliaris* Seen very well at Berenty.
Madagascan Owl ◊ (M Long-eared O) *Asio madagascariensis* A roosting adult at Perinet.
Marsh Owl *Asio capensis* Seen at Tana airport.
Madagascan Nightjar ◊ *Caprimulgus madagascariensis* Numerous at Ifaty, a handful elsewhere.
Collared Nightjar ◊ *Caprimulgus enarratus* Exceptional views of 2 roosting at Perinet, and one at night in Masoala!
Madagascan Spinetail ◊ *Zonavena grandidieri* A handful at Mantadia, Zombitse and Ifaty, several at Masoala.
African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus* Widespread in mostly small numbers.
Alpine Swift *Tachymarptis melba* A couple of sightings.
Malagasy Black Swift ◊ *Apus balstoni* A few sightings.



Two notorious skulkers: Madagascan Flufftail and Brown Mesite. (DLV)

Cuckoo Roller ◊ *Leptosomus discolor* Eventually seen very well at Ampijoroa and Masoala.
Broad-billed Roller *Eurystomus glaucurus* Fairly widespread, especially common at Ampijoroa.
Short-legged Ground Roller ◊ *Brachypteracias leptosomus* Great views at Mantadia.
Scaly Ground Roller ◊ *Geobiastes squamiger* One seen very well at Mantadia.
Pitta-like Ground Roller ◊ *Atelornis pittoides* Great views at Mantadia and Vohiparara.
Rufous-headed Ground Roller ◊ *Atelornis crossleyi* Excellent views of 2 at Vohiparara.

Long-tailed Ground Roller ◊ *Uratelornis chimaera* Superb views of this iconic species at Ifaty.
Madagascan Pygmy Kingfisher ◊ *Corythornis madagascariensis* Singles at Mantadia and Perinet.
Malagasy Kingfisher ◊ (Mad. Malachite K) *Corythornis vintsioides* Widespread encounters on nine dates.
Olive Bee-eater (Mad. B-e) *Merops superciliosus* Widespread, often common, especially in the west.
Madagascan Hoopoe ◊ *Upupa marginata* Several at Ampijoroa and in the west.
Malagasy Kestrel ◊ *Falco newtoni* Common and widespread.



Red-breasted, Running, Coquerel's and Red-capped Couas. (DLV)

Banded Kestrel ◊ *Falco zoniventris* One seen very well at Ampijoroa.
Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* One seen.
Grey-headed Lovebird ◊ *Agapornis canus* Fairly common in the west.
Greater Vasa Parrot ◊ *Coracopsis vasa* Seen a couple of times.
Lesser Vasa Parrot ◊ *Coracopsis nigra* Widespread.
Velvet Asity ◊ *Philepitta castanea* Cracking views of males at Ranomafana, also at Perinet.
Schlegel's Asity ◊ *Philepitta schlegeli* Cracking views of males at Ampijoroa.
Common Sunbird-Asity ◊ *Neodrepanis coruscans* Seen at Ranomafana.
Yellow-bellied Sunbird-Asity ◊ *Neodrepanis hypoxantha* Excellent views at Vohiparara.
Red-tailed Vanga ◊ *Calicalicus madagascariensis* Seen a handful of times, including nice males.
Red-shouldered Vanga ◊ *Calicalicus rufocarpalis* Great views of a male at Tulear tablelands.
Hook-billed Vanga ◊ *Vanga curvirostris* Several sightings.
Bernier's Vanga ◊ *Oriolia bernieri* Two showy females and a male at Masoala.
Lafresnaye's Vanga ◊ *Xenopirostris xenopirostris* A pair seen at Ifaty.
Van Dam's Vanga ◊ *Xenopirostris damii* Excellent views of a pair at Ampijoroa.
Pollen's Vanga ◊ *Xenopirostris polleni* Good albeit brief views at Vohiparara.
Sickle-billed Vanga ◊ *Falcula palliata* Great views at Ampijoroa and Ifaty.
White-headed Vanga ◊ *Artamella viridis* Encountered at Ifaty, Perinet and Ampijoroa.
Chabert Vanga ◊ *Leptopterus chabert* Widespread.
Blue Vanga ◊ *Cyanolanius madagascarinus* Stunner! Seen well many times, first at Perinet.

Rufous Vanga ♦ *Schetba rufa* Good views at Ampijoroa.
Helmet Vanga ♦ *Euryceros prevostii* At least five at Masoala, including a pair nest building. What a cracking bird!
Tylas Vanga ♦ *Tylas eduardi* Seen best at Vohiparara and Masoala.
Nuthatch Vanga ♦ *Hypositta corallirostris* Good views Perinet, Andohahela and Masoala.
Dark Newtonia ♦ *Newtonia amphichroa* Seen well at Vohiparara.
Common Newtonia ♦ *Newtonia brunneicauda* Common in wooded areas.
Archbold's Newtonia ♦ *Newtonia archboldi* Good views of 2 at Ifaty.
Red-tailed Newtonia ♦ *Newtonia fanovanae* Cracking views at Andohahela.
Ward's Flycatcher ♦ *Pseudobias wardi* Seen well a few times.
Crossley's Vanga ♦ (C Babbler) *Mystacornis crossleyi* Two showy ones Ranomafana.
Madagascan Cuckooshrike ♦ *Coracina cinerea* Several sightings.



Appert's Tetraka and Crossley's Babbler. (DLV)

Crested Drongo *Dicrurus forficatus* Often common and very widespread.
Malagasy Paradise Flycatcher ♦ *Terpsiphone mutata* Common in wooded areas.
Pied Crow *Corvus albus* Common in arid country.
Madagasy Lark ♦ *Mirafra hova* Common in arid country.
Malagasy Bulbul ♦ *Hypsipetes madagascariensis* Fairly common and widespread.

Mascarene Martin ◊ *Phedina borbonica* Widespread encounters.
Brown-throated Martin *Riparia paludicola* A few sightings.
Malagasy Brush Warbler ◊ *Nesillas typica* Often heard and regularly seen except in the arid southwest.
Subdesert Brush Warbler ◊ *Nesillas lantzii* Often heard with a few seen well in the arid southwest.
Madagascan Swamp Warbler ◊ *Acrocephalus newtoni* Noted a few times.
Brown Emutail ◊ *Bradypterus brunneus* Quite good views of this notorious skulker at Vohiparara
White-throated Oxylabes ◊ *Oxylabes madagascariensis* Seen well at Ranomafana.



Littoral, Benson's and Forest Rock Thrushes. (DLV)

Long-billed Bernieria (L-b Greenbul) ◊ *Bernieria madagascariensis* Seen quite regularly.
Cryptic Warbler ◊ *Cryptosylvicola randrianasoloi* Good views of a singing bird at Vohiparara.
Wedge-tailed Jery ◊ *Hartertula flavoviridis* Seen well at Vohiparara.
Thamnornis ◊ (T Warbler) *Thamnornis chloropetoides* Great views at Ifaty.
Spectacled Tetraka ◊ (S Greenbul) *Xanthomixis zosterops* Noted at Mantadia, Perinet, Vohiparara and Masoala.

Appert's Tetraka ◊ (A Greenbul) *Xanthomixis apperti* A trip at Zombitse.
Grey-crowned Tetraka (G-c Greenbul) *Xanthomixis cinereiceps* A small flock at Vohiparara.
Madagascan Yellowbrow ◊ *Crossleyia xanthophrys* One seen very well at Vohiparara.
Rand's Warbler ◊ *Randia pseudozosterops* Several at Mantadia, Perinet and Ranomafana.
Common Jery ◊ *Neomixis tenella* Widespread and common.
Green Jery ◊ *Neomixis viridis* Several encounters.
Stripe-throated Jery ◊ *Neomixis striatigula* Seen well several times.



The rare Bernier's Vanga, Hook-billed Vanga and Van Dam's Vanga. (DLV)

Madagascan Cisticola ◊ *Cisticola cherina* Fairly common in arid brush country.
Malagasy White-eye ◊ *Zosterops maderaspatanus* Widespread encounters.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* Common and very widespread.
Madagascan Starling ◊ *Hartlaubius auratus* A handful at Perinet, Ranomafana and Masoala.
Madagascan Magpie-Robin ◊ *Copsychus albospectularis* Fairly common and widespread.
Madagascan Stonechat ◊ *Saxicola sibilla* Scattered records in the highlands.
Littoral Rock Thrush ◊ *Monticola imerina* A showy male at Anakao.



Red-tailed and Red-shouldered Vangas, Madagascan Cisticola and Yellow-bellied Sunbird Asity. (DLV)

Forest Rock Thrush ◊ *Monticola sharpei* Seen well at Vohiparara.
Benson's Rock Thrush ◊ *Monticola (sharpei) bensoni* A cooperative male at Isalo.
Souimanga Sunbird ◊ *Cinnyris sovimanga* Common and widespread.
Malagasy Green Sunbird ◊ (Long-billed G S) *Cinnyris notatus* A handful at various sites.
House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* Seen at Ampijoroa.
Nelicourvi Weaver ◊ *Ploceus nelicourvi* Noted at Perinet, Mantadia, Ranomafana and Masoala.
Sakalava Weaver ◊ *Ploceus sakalava* Common in the southwest, a few elsewhere.
Red Fody ◊ *Foudia madagascariensis* Fairly widespread, sometimes common, mostly female-like birds.
Forest Fody ◊ *Foudia omissa* Only one male seen well at Ranomafana, scarcer than usual this year.
Madagascan Mannikin ◊ *Lemuresthes nana* Noted at several sites.
Madagascan Wagtail ◊ *Motacilla flaviventris* Common in the east.



Madagascar Starling and Green-capped (Brown-capped) Coua. (DLV)

MAMMALS

- Fossa** *Cryptoprocta ferox* A mating pair heard and seen by the local guide at Perinet.
- Lowland Streaked Tenrec** *Hemicentetes semispinosus* Singles at Perinet and Maroantsetra.
- Madagascar Flying Fox** *Pteropus rufus* Many at Berenty.
- Commerson's Leaf-nosed Bat** *Hipposideros commersoni* Seen at Ampijoroa.
- Grey-brown Mouse Lemur (Reddish-grey M L)** *Microcebus griseorufus* Seen at Ifaty.
- Goodman's Mouse Lemur** *Microcebus lehilahytsara* Seen at Perinet at night.
- Furry-eared Dwarf Lemur** *Cheirogaleus crossleyi* Seen at Perinet.
- Greater Dwarf Lemur** Seen at Masoala.

Hubbard's Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur hubbardi* Seen at Zombitse.
White-footed Sportive Lemur *Lepilemur leucopus* Seen at Ifaty and Berenty.
Sportive Lemur sp *Lepilemur sp* One "black-shouldered" form at Ifaty.
Eastern Grey Bamboo Lemur (Grey B L) *Hapalemur griseus* Seen a few times
Ring-tailed Lemur *Lemur catta* Common at Berenty.
Red-bellied Lemur *Eulemur rubriverter* A handful at Ranamofana.



White-footed and an undescribed Sportive Lemur sp, and Ring-tailed Lemurs. (DLV)

Common Brown Lemur *Eulemur fulvus* A few at Ampijoroa and Perinet.
White-fronted Brown Lemur *Eulemur albifrons* Seen at Masoala.
Red-fronted Brown Lemur *Eulemur rufus* Seen at Ranamofana.
Black-and-white Ruffed Lemur *Varecia variagata* Good views several times.

Red Ruffed Lemur *Varecia rubra* Excellent views at Masoala.
Eastern Avahi (Eastern Woolly Lemur) *Avahi laniger* Three at Masoala.
Verreaux's Sifaka *Propithecus verreauxi* Close encounters at Zombitse and Berenty.
Coquerel's Sifaka *Propithecus coquereli* Great views at Ampijoroa.
Milne-Edwardes's Sifaka *Propithecus edwardsi* Seen at Vohiparara.
Indri *Indri indri* Several at Perinet.
Eastern Red Forest Rat *Nesomys rufus* Seen at Ranomafana.
Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaengliae* Superb views of two breaching close to shore at Fort Dauphin.



Mossy Leaf-tailed Gecko and Tomato Frog. (DLV)

NOTES TO THE SYSTEMATIC LIST

Madagascar Gull *Larus (dominicanus) melisandae*

This taxon has a complex taxonomic history that is still not fully resolved. Traditionally, one species, Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*, has been considered to account for all of the black-backed gulls breeding in the southern hemisphere. More recently some authors have separated southern African populations, including those in Madagascar, as Cape Gull *L. vetula* based mainly on the somewhat different appearance of mainland African birds from those in South America. However, birds from Madagascar are still very poorly known, few specimens are available for study and their genetic profile has not yet been assessed. It is increasingly clear though that they look distinctly different from birds in southern Africa, being relatively small and slim-billed, in having yellow (sometimes bright yellow, not greyish-green) legs and pale eyes. In many regards some look much more like a Lesser Black-backed Gull *L. fuscus* than *vetula*. Support for their recognition as a separate taxon is strong and they are now widely recognised as the endemic form *melisandae*; some (including IOC) treating this as a race of the enlarged Kelp Gull *L. dominicanus*, some as a race of Cape Gull *L. vetula* and, more recently, as a separate species altogether. We provisionally follow this latter treatment pending further research on the entire complex. Madagascar Gull breeds only in southern and southwestern Madagascar, where it appears to be rather scarce (the largest flock ever recorded only contained 90 birds) and very localised.

Three-banded Plover *Charadrius tricollaris*

The form concerned is endemic *bifrontatus* which some recent authors, including the recent Birdlife/HBW Checklist, split as Madagascar Three-banded Plover *C. bifrontatus* on the basis of several small differences in head and breast pattern and colour.



Brown-capped Coua (Green-c C, Olive-c C) *Coua (ruficeps) olivaceiceps*

IOC and some others lump this form which is found in the southwest (in the Tulear area) in Red-capped Coua *C. ruficeps*. The name Brown-capped seems preferable as there is only the faintest hint of an olive tone in the crown.

Benson's Rock Thrush *Monticola (sharpei) bensoni*

Recent papers do not support previous splits of Amber Mountain Rock Thrush or Benson's Rock Thrush, now included in Forest Rock Thrush (Outlaw et al. 2007, Zuccon and Ericson 2010)

Crested Coua *Coua cristata*

The recent Birdlife/HBW checklist splits the rufous-vented form of the southwest (which we saw at Zombitse, Ifaty and Berenty) as Chestnut-vented Coua *C. pyropyga*.



Malagasy Brush Warbler, Subdesert Brush Warbler and a leucistic Madagascar Swamp Warbler. (DLV)



Birdquest group in the spiny forest of Ifaty.